

Guiding principles for networking & community building

Good practices and examples for facilitators

When organizing an event in CHARM-EU with the aim of fostering networking among participants from various universities, it is essential to consider the following six principles. Below you will find some ideas for putting those principles into practice. These are the result of several pilots that CHARM-EU has carried out over the past few years.

ENGAGE INCLUSIVELY

❑ **Embrace and value diverse perspectives to ensure that all participants feel respected, heard, and represented in the conversation or activity.**



- Have your target group in mind during the planning process: What do they need? What do they get out of the event?
- Let participants define rules for working together in the beginning of the event: What is important to them? What should be avoided?
- Use icebreaking activities so that people get to know each other (e.g. living statistics, triangle of communalities, speed dating...).
- Highlight the expertise of participants (e.g. through networking cards (“wall of expertise”). Have participants share best practices throughout the event (either online or on the first day of the networking event).
- Welcome also those participants who can only attend parts of the event.
- Combine face-to-face and virtual elements for better accessibility.
- Use a human centered approach to issues and solutions.
- Allow participants to take care of their needs (e.g. important phone calls or meetings during the networking event).
- Try to check if participants feel stressed and approach them individually to ask about their needs.
- Dedicate sufficient time for community building, e.g., while using Design Thinking, ensure that enough time is spent for empathy and that participants get to know as many people as possible (use speed dating/friending).
- On a practical note: ask for dietary preferences/ allergies and accommodate and inform (!) about alternative food options, etc., so participants don't have to go look for it themselves.
- If people are excluded from the conversation try to step in as facilitator to include them again and more actively.
- Make sure to share the schedule at the beginning of the day and stick (more or less) to it, so participants know what to expect and when certain tasks end – especially if you have participants who can only attend partly.
- Offer several slots for group discussion, so more reserved participants have time to get comfortable participating throughout the event.

WORK AGILEY

☐ Choose a method and way of working flexible based on the needs of the participants.



- Leave room on the agenda for flexibility and adapt it according to unforeseen events if necessary.
- Ask for the needs of participants at the beginning of your event. Take feedback from participants during the session and adapt to it.
- Be aware that participants may not voluntarily have chosen to attend. In this case: 1. Explain thoroughly the why. 2. Give extra time for connecting.
- Make sure that participants (especially group leaders) early in the process agree on outcomes, programme, responsibilities.
- Encourage participants to choose the challenges they would like to tackle.
- Use agile methods (e.g. Design Thinking or SCRUM) and provide material accordingly (e.g. sticky notes, whiteboards, flipovers, etc.).
- Use online collaboration tools (e.g. Google Workspace or Miro) and make sure that all participants feel comfortable using them.
- Allow enough time for questions and discussion.
- Actively create space for breaks and networking.
- If things go sideways, don't worry. Allow for mistakes to happen.
- Remember that CHARM-EU's way of working may be new to participants.

PARTICIPATE COLLABORATIVELY

☐ Work collectively towards shared goals, leveraging diverse strengths and perspectives, and fostering open communication to achieve mutual success.



- Involve the target group in planning (e.g. a representative of the host university's team, who will be participating in the networking event).
- Jointly define concepts that are of relevance for the group.
- Invite all relevant stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers, researchers, administrative staff).
- Let people work together in groups of **up to four participants**.
- Plan enough time for all participants to work on their concrete collaboration projects.
- Let participants change groups if they find another project more interesting/fitting (e.g. in the beginning of the second day).
- Try to split the facilitation of the event according to comfort zones.
- Involve the hosts of the networking events in active facilitation (welcoming, setting the ground and giving a purpose).
- Mix groups for a certain time for an "outside" perspective on their project.
- As a facilitator try to find the next follow up host in informal event parts (dinner, lunch etc.) rather than wait for the "cold call" at the end.
- Let the teams present their collaboration projects to the others (e.g. gallery walk), this inspires other teams to have further ideas.
- At the end of the meeting: Set up follow up meetings with all groups – even if the motivation seems not to be there as much.

COMMUNICATE TRANSPARENTLY

- ❑ **Openly share information, intentions, and decisions, fostering clarity and trust in the exchange of ideas and messages.**



- During the planning process: Find a clear goal for the networking event and assign tasks accordingly. Use phone calls or videocalls to save time.
- Share information (e.g. on target group and aims) early with all universities.
- Make sure the aim of the event is clear to all participants so that everyone is on the same page and expectations are met.
- Establish a group chat for easy communication between participants.
- Check in with participants during group work.
- Increase the visibility of the event with pictures, videos, and news.
- Use storytelling to give abstract ideas a concrete sequence and use analogies to connect unfamiliar ideas to something already understood by participants.

ENCOURAGE INNOVATION

- ❑ **Create a supportive environment that inspires creative thinking, risk-taking, and the exploration of novel ideas to drive positive change and progress.**



- Use new hybrid solutions (e.g. online world café).
- Foster (potentially) interdisciplinarity.
- Use “Design” as a tool to drive innovation.
- Keep sustainability in mind and think of new ways of collaborating.
- Use pilots to test principles and ideas.
- Share also what did not work out.
- Follow up on ideas from networking events (e.g. sharing of results or prototypes).
- Activate participants through physical movement (e.g. “walk the talk”).
- Use out of the comfort zone activities like drawing or role-playing.
- Try to engage participants through questions but don't stress about it as long as they do not keep others from participating.
- If groups are a bit stuck, you can ask open-ended questions to get them thinking about their ideas from new angles.
- Whenever a brainstorming activity is on the agenda, align on the 'rules' of creativity (every idea is allowed, no "but" rather an "and"...).
- Leave space to discuss pilots with other participants for outside input.
- Use iterative processes to spark innovation.

LIVE INTERCULTURALITY

- ❑ Embrace and integrate diverse cultural perspectives into conversations and activities to foster understanding and cooperation across different cultural backgrounds.



- Invite participants from multiple countries.
- Openly discuss intercultural communication, biases and stereotypes (e.g., play the [Buffalo game](#)).
- Use icebreaking activities related to interculturality (e.g. ask the participants to explain the meaning of their name or let them draw a map of Europe without speaking).
- Include cultural activities or experience points in the programme (e.g. guided tours, Peek App).
- Provide an info sheet on local cultural offers.
- Share cultural perspectives over joint meals and include specific food/eating culture of the hosting country/region during the meetings.
- Observe how participants collaborate differently and bring it up during facilitation: different engagement in conversations, etc.
- Give time to participants to find common ground across institutions and cultures and to explain their way of doing something.
- Be aware of different customs regarding meetings (e.g. punctuality).
- Adapt and wing it!

And probably most important: Have fun! Then the participants will enjoy it too :-)